

## Homophobia, Denial, Death: American Beauty Revisited

Souvik Bhattacharjee

### Abstract

*American Beauty* (1999), written by Alan Ball and directed by Sam Mendes is a film that encapsulates many aspects of life in the American suburbia at the turn of the century. The focal character, one Lester Burnham, aged forty-two suffers from an acute existential crisis when Angela, friend to Lester's daughter Jane, appears in his life and upholds the opportunity to escape from his mundane existence and relive his youth. On the other hand is a retired U.S. Marine, Colonel Frank Fitts, a repressed homosexual, who along with his wife Barbara and son Ricky moves to the Burnhams' next-door. This paper intends to reread *American Beauty* not through the perspective of Lester Burnham but through the eyes of Colonel Frank Fitts, who does more to shape the plot than Lester himself. While bringing in to discussion Jody W. Pennington's views on the film, this paper highlights the limitations of his work and investigates grounds for a deeper understanding and motivations of the 'absent/present' character Frank Fitts. While reading the film as a text, this paper also cross-references the [un]altered film scripts of *American Beauty* to show how layered the emotions are and how strong the ramification of Frank who, although, a 'murderer', is as innocent as the one 'murdered'. He is, to quote one Indian poetess, "the sinner and the saint". Focusing on the psychoanalytical implications of 'denial' this paper tries to project how Frank's tragic denial of his sexual orientation contributes to his homophobia while challenging, albeit indirectly, our deep-seated notions of 'normativity'.

**Keywords:** Homosexuality, Repression, Denial, Homophobia, American Cinema.